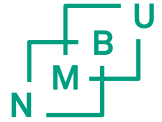*Sloppiness of language both reflects and reinforces the sloppiness of underlying thoughts.*

George Orwell

Clarity

Character Action
Nouns & Nominalization
Verbs & Voice

William S. Warner

Agenda

Thursday	Topic: **Clarity**	Document for exercises: **Discussion**
09:15-09:45	Lecture: Character-action	W.S Warner
09:45-10:00	Exercise: Identify prepositions; find hidden subjects and verbs	

Break

| 10:15-10:45 | Lecture: Nominalization & Abstraction | W.S. Warner |
| 10:45-11:00 | Exercise: Identify unnecessary nominalization, vague pronouns & abstractions | |

Break

| 11:15-11:45 | Lecture: Verbs & Voice | W.S. Warner |
| 11:45-12:00 | Exercise: Search for weak passive sentence that could be active | |

Why do we write like this?

Long sentences, passive voice, dehumanizing

Scientists writing to other scientists
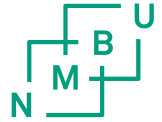
Experts see patterns but miss other things

Experts assume readers have their

      vocabulary

      technical skills

      factual knowledge

Curse of Knowledge

Doesn't occur to the writer that the reader

    doesn't know technical terms *(sounds like jargon)*

    doesn't know steps *(that seem too obvious to mention)*
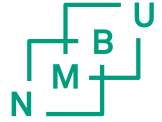
    can't visualize scene *(in writer's mind)*

So writer doesn't

    explain jargon (gibberish)

    spell out logic

    supply concrete details (examples)

Even when writing for professional peers

Curse of Knowledge

- Difficult to imagine what it's like for someone else *not* to know something that you know.

Abbreviations. . . Jargon. . . Technical terms. . . Abstraction

✓Better to assume too little than too much.

✓Assume reader is intelligent like you,

but they don't know what you know.
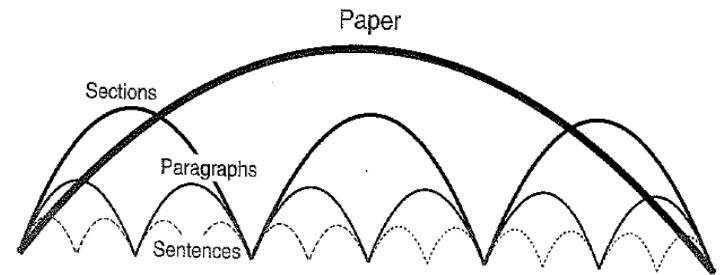
Understand the Story

Vital for all stories
- ✓ characters
- ✓ their actions

Scientists tell stories about things that cannot speak for themselves

Principle 1: make characters **subjects**

Principle 2: make their actions **verbs**

clearly state **who** is doing **what**

Building Sentences

How to construct the shortest possible story

1. Who is the story about? = subject
2. What happened? = verb
3. What was its outcome? = object

1. Board
2. Hammer
3. Nail

Development: action

Build tension

Relieve tension

Opening

Resolution

How to make it **un**clear
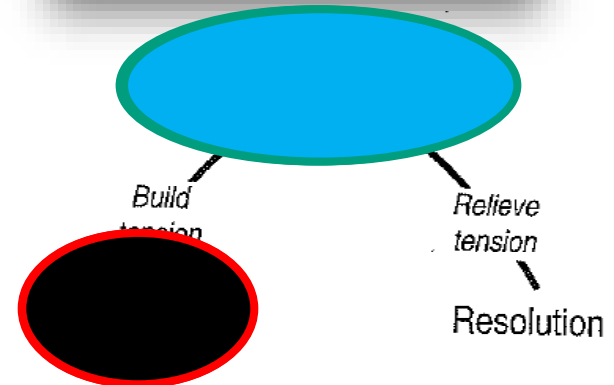
✓ Make it **sound** academic

✓ Hide the characters

✓ Turn their actions (verbs) into nouns

Build tension

Relieve tension

Resolution

Misunderstood or Not Understood

The second concerns how to keep to a minimum the risk, if in time of crisis or conflict peace time deterrence has failed or looks like doing so, that (as with mobilisation and transport schedules in Europe in 1914) operational, logistical or political features of the situation may work against taking decisions on adequate information and after proper consideration and time for communication, and so may increase whatever dangers may exist of precipitate misjudgement.

Thinking about Nuclear Weapons
Micheal Quinlan

Compare same story

Our lack of knowledge about local conditions precluded determination of experiment action effectiveness in sample determination to those areas in greatest need of representation.

Because we knew nothing about local conditions, we could not determine how effectively the experiment had sampled areas that most needed representation.

Sentence 1 is unclear. Why?
- ✓ Characters are **not subjects**
- ✓ Actions are **not verbs**

Sentence 2 subjects name **characters**; actions are **verbs**

What characters?

The current estimate is of 50% reduction in the introduction of new feed products in the event that compliance with the Preliminary Manufacture Notice becomes a requirement under proposed EU legislation.
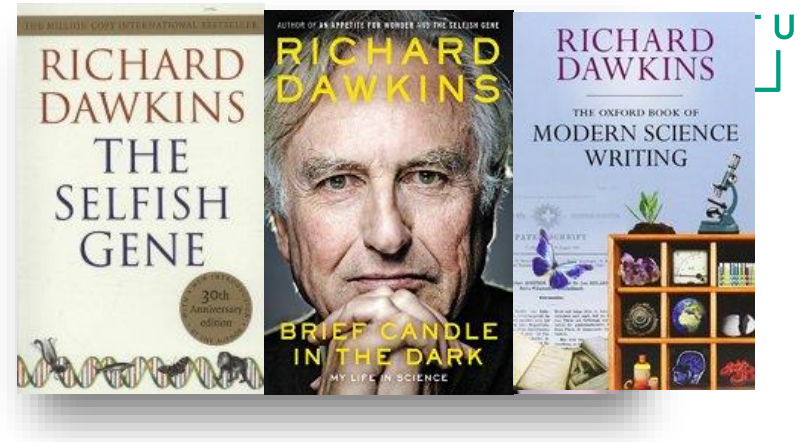
If **the EU requires** that **the feed industry complies** with the Preliminary Manufacturing Notice, **we estimate** that **the industry will introduce** 50% fewer new products.

When characters are **concepts**

Because intellectual foundations of evolution are the same as so many other scientific theories, the falsification of their foundations would be necessary for the replacement of evolutionary theory with creationism.

In contrast to creationism, the **theory of evolution shares** its intellectual foundations with many other theories. As a result, **creationism will displace** evolutionary theory only when **it can first prove** that the **foundations of those other theories are false**.

Despite his knowledge of the need by the cities for new revenues for improvement of their schools, the Governor executed a veto of the budget bill to give encouragement to the cities for an increase of local taxes.

Characters and *actions*

Governor

knew something

vetoed a bill

will encourage the cities

The cities

need revenue

[should] *improve* schools

[should] *increase* taxes

Schools

will be improved

Though the **Governor** *knew* that the **cities** *needed* new revenue *to improve* schools, **he** *vetoed* the budget bill *to encourage* **cities** *to increase* local taxes.

Verbs that merely state action exists

What's the action?

We *conducted* an (investigation) of it.

We ***investigated*** it.

A (review) *was done* on the literature.

They ***reviewed*** the literature.

A need *exists* for sample (selection) efficiency.

We must ***select*** samples efficiently.

There is the possibility of prior (approval) of it.

He might ***approve*** of it early.

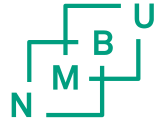William S. Warner

Writers' Boot Camp

Write clearly!

Were you told to:

- A. Avoid prepositional phrases?
- B. Be specific?
- C. Connect topics?
- D. Deconstruct long sentences?

Principle 1: make characters **subjects**
Principle 2: make their actions **verbs**

Prepositions *show relationships*

Where?

Her paper was **under** the chair.

Lectures are **in** Canvas.

The dog crawled **between** us.

His flat was **over** the shop.

When?

They arrived **on** Sunday.

The class starts **at** 10:15.

He came **after** class.

How something acts

We went **by** train.

They stared **without** speaking.

Often more than one word

He passed the course **because of** the Writing Centre.

We sat **next to** each other.

The book is **on top** of the desk.

Common prepositions in writing

of
to
for
by
from
in

The purported intention of this course is to enhance the development of necessary skills in academic writing, thereby increasing output from students while simultaneously clarifying the meaning of that which is to be communicated in writing from the author to the reader.

UNCLEAR

A.void prepositional phrases

*An evaluation **of** the program **by** us will allow greater efficiency **in** allocation **for** funds.*

Subject names characters
 + verbs show their actions
reduce prepositional phrases

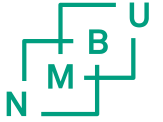*__We__ will **evaluate** the program so that **we** can **allocate** funds efficiently.*

1.Identify prepositions

of
to
for
by
from
in

An evaluation of the program by us will allow for greater efficiency in allocation for funds.

1. Identify prepositions
2. Find *hidden* subjects and **verbs**

of
to
for
by
from
in

An *evaluation* of the program by **us** will allow for greater efficiency in *allocation* for funds.

1. Identify prepositions
2. Find *hidden* subjects and **verbs**
3. Revise for character action

of
to
for
by
from
in

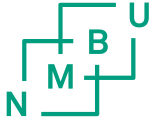An *evaluation* of the program by **us** will allow for greater efficiency in *allocation* for funds.

We will evaluate the program so **we can allocate** funds efficiently.

Reorder WORDS, not IDEAS

of

to

for

by

from

in

around of:

An evaluation of the program identified weakness in planning and implementation.

The program evaluation identified weakness in planning and implementation.

Exercise

Select a paragraph from your Discussion

For each sentence:

1. Identify prepositions
2. Find *hidden* subjects and **verbs**
3. Revise for character action

B. specific!
Write concretely

turn verbs into nouns
- characters
abstract and weak

There has been a **decision** *for research* **termination**.

subject names characters
+ verbs show their actions
specific and concrete

The project leader **decided** *to* **terminate** *research*.

C.onnect to clarify relationships

The more effective presentation of needs by other parties to the UN resulted in our failure in acquiring funds, despite intensive lobbying efforts on our part.

Subject names characters

 + verbs show their actions

 + link clauses with connectors (because, although, if...)

clarify the sequences of clauses

*Although **we lobbied** the UN intensively, **we** could not **acquire** funds because **other parties presented** their needs more effectively.*

D.construct long, multi-topic sentences

Make the **characters + actions**

your **subjects + verbs**

Compare the examples and revised sentences

Not length but meaning

Nominalisation
Turning **verbs** and **adjectives** into **nouns**

The temperature of the planet is rising as a result of global warming.

*The **rise** of the planet's temperature is a result of global warming.*

Plagiarism is increasing rapidly and the University is becoming concerned.

*The rapid **increase** in plagiarism concerns the University.*

Common in academic writing

✓Creates variety in your writing

✓Prevents repeating verb

✓Conveys an objective tone

✓Can make text more concise

✓More formal

William S. Warner

But it can impede communication

The president is desirous of trying to see how we can make our efforts in order to find a way to facilitate.

✓ Who are the **actors**?

✓ Where is the **action**?

✓ What is the **story**?

The president wants to help.

These institutional changes in implementation strategies of the rehabilitation and reconstruction activities faced a number of complications in coordination, stakeholder identification and accessing target population.

William S. Warner

Nominalization

✓ Add a suffix like ***ity, tion*** or ***ism*** to

adjective (*liberal*)

verb (*calibrate*)

even another noun (*argument*)

new noun: *liberalism*, *calibration*, *argumentation*

- Cannibalized active verbs suck the lifeblood from adjectives and substitute abstract entities for human subjects

- Academics, lawyers, bureaucrats, business writers love them

The Director brought up for orientation and discussion the suggestion to announce a position as Head of Administration.

William S. Warner

Proliferation of nominalizations in a discursive formation may be an indication of a tendency toward pomposity and abstraction.

✓ Fails to tell us **who** is doing **what**.

Eliminate or reanimate the zombie nouns

Add human subject and active verbs – life returns:

Writers who overload their sentences with nominalizations tend to sound pompous and abstract.

William S. Warner

Principle 3

Avoid **useless, excessive** nominalization

Typically the **beginning** of the sentence
and produce more zombie nouns

A need exists for sample collection efficiency.
We (you, I, the students) must collect samples efficiently.

But remember: nominalization can be necessary, e.g.,
if the nominalized **subject** refers to a previous sentence:

These arguments depend on a single unproven claim.
This decision caused costly consequences.

KILL THE ZOMBIE

Nominalization linked to an *empty verb*

The committee has no expectation that it will meet the deadline.
The committee does not expect to meet the deadline.
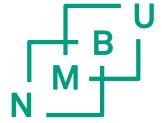
✓replace the **nominal** <u>subject</u>

<u>Our discussion</u> concerned the term paper.
We discussed the term paper.

The <u>intention</u> of the professor is to teach students how to avoid nominalization.
The professor intends to teach students how to avoid nominalization.

Notice how we trim down the original sentences?

Look for multiplicat**ion**

There was first an explanation
of the evolution of social media.

Turn the first one into a verb:

   First, she explained the evolution of social media.

Turn the second into a verb…

   in a clause beginning with *how* or *why*:

   *First, she explained **how** social media **evolved**.*
   *First, she explained **why** social media **evolved**.*

   How and *why* are different.

Clarification about Nominalization in **the** Elimination **of** Abstraction

Abstract nouns attract *of's* and *the's*

The *conclusion* that *the* *reduction* *of* abstract*ion* brought about by *the* *elimination* *of* *nominalization* to *the* annual report was carried out...

Liberate the active verb hidden in every abstract noun and these redundant words will disappear.

William S. Warner

Avoid turning nouns into verbs

You've been friended.

Mothers and fathers now parent.

Unemployment is trending upwards.

Trump's messaging is wrong.

Scientists evidence, writers text, all google.

The ridiculous: verbs to nouns to verbs

We must conference. (from We must confer)

Obama statemented... Obama stated

Principle 4: Avoid Abstraction

Concrete

If a baby girl born 40,000 years ago were kidnapped by a time traveler and raised in a normal family in Oslo, she would be ready for college in 18 years. She would learn Norwegian and English, know how to write and ski, follow pop music and Facebook; she would probably want a pierced tongue and a couple of tattoos.
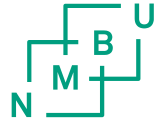
Creative heuristic offers an exemplary narrative?

Abstract

Replicating the post-Mendel application of Lamarck's apparently superseded scientific theory by non-empirical social scientists, Vernon Lee's fervent and intellectually original use of scientific paradigms across different fields in order to further a specific literary and creative heuristic offers an exemplary narrative trace, replete with hybridized methodologies and rhetorical deployment of language in non-scientific discourses.

Literary Studies

William S. Warner
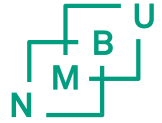
Avoid Excessive Abstract Pronouns

Common pronouns: It, this, that, those, those, them, their, one(s)

It was because of those results that the research decided it would use them instead of the ones that this research originally began with.

Who does what in this sentence?

Subjects and verbs are unclear

Avoid Excessive Abstract Pronouns

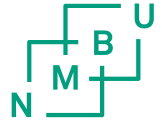Excessive or unspecified **pronouns** cause abstraction

It was because of those results that the research decided it would use them instead of the ones that this research originally began with.

Identify vague pronouns

Use concrete subjects and verbs instead

Revise for clarity

Avoid Excessive Abstract Pronouns

It was because of those results that the research decided it would use them instead of the ones that this research originally began with. ❌
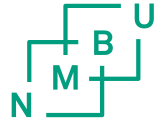
*Current results proved the original data was incorrect. Therefore, the research team decided to use **this** new data instead of the original data set.* ✔

Useful pronoun.
Directs to clear information in previous sentence.

Principles for the abstract:
it, this, that, there

- Use *this* only when accompanied by a **modifying noun**

  This shows   *This **argument** shows*
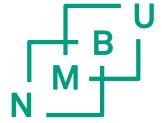
- Use *it* only when the noun *it* refers to is crystal clear

  *He threw the laptop through the window and **it** broke.*

  The window or laptop?

- Avoid using *that* more than once in a single sentence, except in parallel construction.

*Sentences **that** rely on subordinate clauses **that** in turn contain other clauses **that** introduce new ideas **that** distract from the main argument **that** the author is trying to make. . .*

At least one sentence per paragraph

- A **concrete noun** or **human entity** as its **subject**,
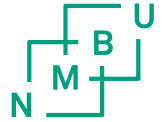
- Followed by an *active* **verb**.

*ISIS competes, **Social scientists** assume, **Chemists** fear*

Noun-verb should pack a quick punch:

Police enforce, Judges avoid, Lawyers argue

Separate **noun** + **verb** and the reader loses the plot:

*The **knowledge** that criminalization of marijuana use can lead to a wide variety of other social ills, including an increased risk of addiction to more dangerous and expensive drugs such as heroine and cocaine, **has not prevented** lawmakers. . . .*

Exercise

- For your revised paragraph
- Identify
    - Unnecessary nominalization
    - Vague pronouns
    - Abstractions that could be concrete
- Revise for clarity

July 25, 2014

We Assume that People Who Speak Abstractly Are Powerful

People who described a juice product in abstract terms such as "preservative-free" were judged by research participants to be more powerful—**4.38 versus 3.99** on a 7-point perceived-power scale—than those who described the product in more specific, concrete terms such as "contains no preservatives," says a team led by Cheryl J. Wakslak of the University of Southern California. Participants made the same judgment about writers who used abstract ("Barbara is working hard") versus concrete ("Barbara is writing notes") language. Use of nonspecific language may suggest that a speaker or writer possesses an abstract style of thinking and a willingness to judge, both of which are signals of power, the researchers say.

W.S. Warner

Clarity = Clear focus

Abstraction

Inalienable democratic empowerment would have been delegitimized.

   Lacks concrete focus

   Agent and action uncertain in passive voice

Women *have the right to vote.*

Focus concretely

   Agent of action

   Object of action

All votes *are counted.*

Principle 5:
Voice
determines focus

Active

Emphasizes **agent**

Subject-verb-object **goal**

*John felled **the tree**.*

✓actor precedes action

Passive

Emphasizes **goal**

Subject-verb-everything else.

***The tree** **was** felled by John.*

✓sometimes agent not stated

* **The tree** **was** felled.*

✓Typical scientific writing

Why?

Active
Passive

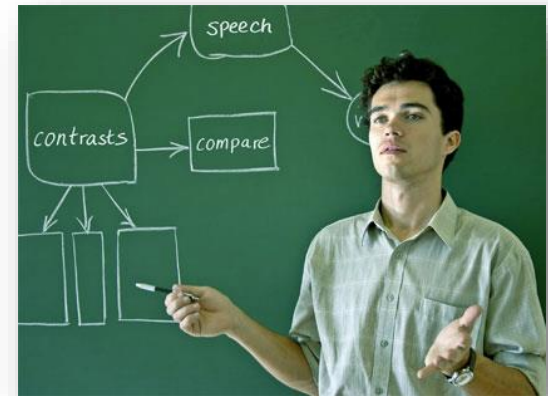|			
Active	**character** → **action** → goal		
	The archer	*hit*	*the target.*
Passive	**goal** ← **action** ← character		
	The target	*was hit.*	?
			by the archer.

First words focus

To focus on
the **agent**

*A clear way of speaking **is** what (students) **are** in need of.*

Who does what?

1. Make the **agent** the subject
2. Make weak ***to be*** verb active

Students *must speak* *clearly.*

Passive: 12 **Active: 4**

What is your focus?

Active: vigorous, direct

Names agent

Noragric investigated a student.

Passive: weak, evasive

When agent is unknown
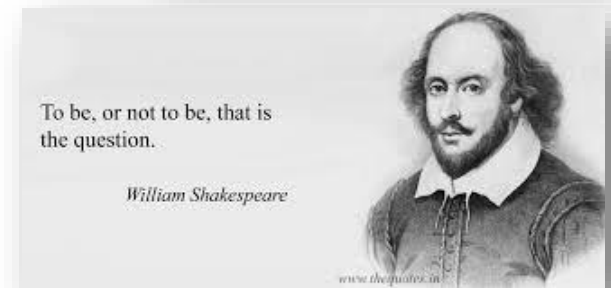
A student was investigated.

You are fired!

To be: is, are, was, were

Weak beginning

Wordy with *nominalizations*

There was a student under investigation.

Focus!

To be, or not to be, that is the question.

William Shakespeare

www.thequotes.in

First words focus
the Unknown

Look for prepositions: *of, by, to, in. . .*

WARNING

Passive: *A new method of analysis was discovered by the student.*
The novel approach revealed in a paper will be submitted.

Active: ***The student** discovered a new method of analysis.*
***She** will submit a paper that reveals the novel approach.*

Passives + nominalizations = general, abstract

Gender movement to less restrictive methods of finance may be followed by increased probability of poverty reduction within households.

Active (character + action) = specific, clear

*If **banks** finance women less restrictively, **they** may increase household wealth.*

Avoid beginning with
Passive Nominalization

*There **was** erosion of the land from **the floods**.*

When nominalization follows there **is, was, are, were**
1. Make the **agent** the subject
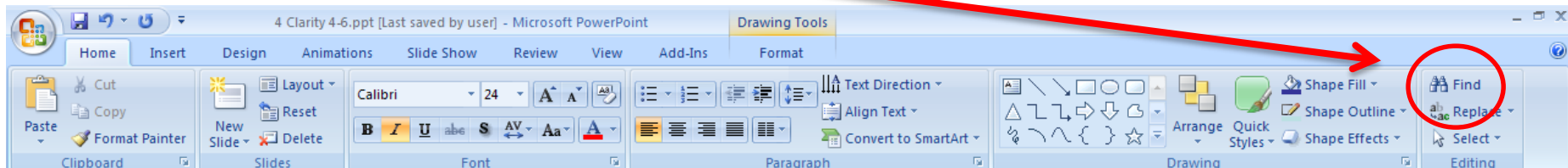2. Change the noun to an active verb

The floods *eroded the land.*   45%

There is a need for study of useless nominalization.
I must study useless nominalization.   45%

✓Find **there**: check for nominalization.

Why use the passive voice?

Mistakes were made.

Don't tell them who made the mistakes.

Goal more important than **agent**

The Senate passed the bill in June.

The bill was passed in June.

You've already made it clear that you're talking about **the Senate**

To avoid stating who is responsible for an action

✓ You don't know or care

Helicopters were flown in to withdraw the last troops.

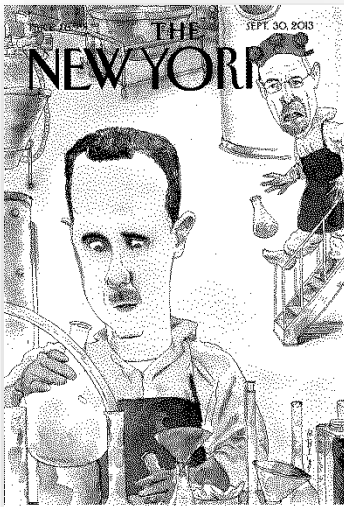No need to know who flew the helicopters.
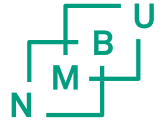
✓ You'd rather not say

Students found guilty of plagiarism can be suspended.

W.S. Warner

UN Report on the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013

"**Chemical weapons** have been used in the ongoing conflict between parties in the Syrian Arab Republic, also against citizens, including children, on a relatively large scale," the report's authors concluded, **in the passive voice** [...] By prior agreement, **the report assigns** no responsibility. But an **appendix on munitions** provides hard evidence on two of the warheads used [...] which turns the passive voice active and leads to one culprit**.**"
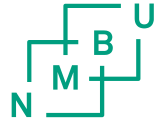
George Packer (2013, September 30)
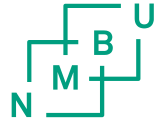
Negotiating Syria, *The New Yorker*, p. 21

W.S. Warner

Methods

A questionnaire was designed to measure the attitudes of women toward food waste. A proportional sample was divided into four age groups. The three components of attitude were addressed by asking 20 questions (each) associated with cognition and emotion. Behavioral tendency was based on recalled events.

Passive

A questionnaire was designed to measure the attitudes of women toward food waste. A proportional sample was divided into four age groups. The three components of attitude were addressed by asking 20 questions (each) associated with cognition and emotion. Behavioral tendency was based on recalled events.

Active

We designed a questionnaire to measure the attitudes of women toward food waste. A village elder divided the women into a proportional sample of four age groups. I addressed the three components of attitude by having the interpreter ask 20 questions associated how the women thought and how they felt about food waste. We evaluated their behavioral tendency by recalled events.

What's the story?

Questionnaire Design

We, my supervisor and I, designed a questionnaire to measure the attitudes of women toward food waste. **A village elder** divided the women into a proportional sample of four age groups. **I** addressed the three components of attitude by having **the interpreter** ask 20 questions associated how **the women** thought and how **they** felt about food waste. **We**, my co-worker and I, evaluated their behavioral tendency by the **women** noting recalled events on the questionnaire.

Passive targets the object

Typical in **Methodology**

~~I cultured the cells for 48 hours in media that I diluted with water.~~

Cells were cultured for 48 hours in media diluted with water.

Active: 14   Passive: 11

✓What's your focus?

See the man with the gasmask?

He is kicking the policeman.

See the policeman?

He is being kicked by the man with the gasmask.

W.S. Warner

Words

Noun – the thought

Technical Term

Jargon

Verb – motor that moves the thought

Idle: static suggestion

Power: dynamic action

Verbs kick-start and color sentences

Create action: *react, infect, erode*

Carry sentiment: *fear, disgust, antagonize*
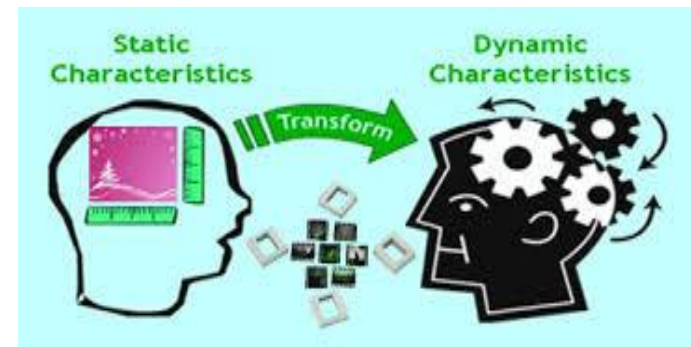
Hint at thinking: *realize, know, assume*

Connect ideas: *deny, prove, correlate*

Assert possession: *own, have, gets*

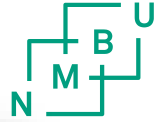Conjure existence itself: *is, are*

Static and Dynamic

Static Characteristics — Transform — Dynamic Characteristics

*Worse with the **abstract!***

Static Verbs (lack color)

TIME IS MONEY

Explicit: **claims** a state of being

> DNA **is** considered…; terrorists **were** responsible for…
>
> Imperialism **was** inspired by… ; theories **are** developed to…

Implicit: *suggests* a state of being

> DNA *is being* considered *to be*
>
> Terrorists *had* been responsible for
>
> Imperialism *might have been* inspired by
>
> For theories *to be* developed *to be* useful

WEAK

Dynamic Verbs

Note action. . . but **don't show**

has, does, goes, gets, puts

The character does something. It goes forward

The solider gets into action.

Dynamos **shows specific** action

The character **runs**, **creeps, stumbles** forward.

*The soldier **comforts** a child.*

Replace vague verbs associated with *get*
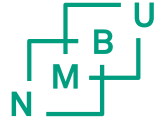
get bigger = grow   get away from = escape

get better = improve   get worse = worsen/deteriorate

get closure = approach   get less important = diminish

Avoid **unnecessary** passive verbs

be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been

- ✓ Convey no movement

- ✓ Often needlessly wordy

- ✓ If active can carry meaning, use it

*A surge of water **was** responsible for the destruction of the nuclear reactor.*

*A surge of water **destroyed** the nuclear reactor.*

*Burying nuclear waste in Antarctica would **be** in violation of an international treaty.*

*… would **violate** an international treaty.*

Use **to be** verbs to link

Subject to a **noun**

    *Plagiarism is a **crime**.*

Subject to an **adjective**

  *Social scientists are not always **sociable**.*
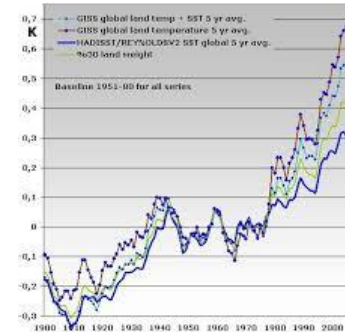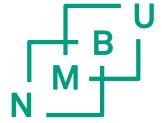
Ongoing action

  *The sample ignited when it was **drying**.*

Signal verbs **introduce evidence**

Wong (2016)   *Does what?*

acknowledges	concludes	notes
adds	condemns	observes
admits	considers	points out
agrees	contends	predicts
argues	describes	proposes
asserts	disagrees	reports
believes	explains	shows
claims	finds	speculates
comments	holds	suggests
concedes	insists	warns

And shows that you have understood and critiqued Wong

Exercise

- For your revised paragraph
- Search for weak passive sentence that could be active
- Replace weak *is, was, are, were*… with active verbs
- Revise for clarity